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William Blake's Songs of Innocence and of Experience: From Innocence to Experience to Wise Innocence

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WILLIAM BLAKE'S SONGS OF INNOCENCE AND OF EXPERIENCE:

FROM INNOCENCE TO EXPERIENCE TO WISE INNOCENCE

(TITLE)

BY

Robert W. Winkleblack

THESIS

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE OF

Master of Arts

IN THE GRADUATE SCHOOL, EASTERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY
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BY

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B.A., University of Illinois, 1970

ABSTRACT OF A THESIS

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1977

The Songs of Innocence and of Experience are a description of the contrary states of the human soul. These poems do not describe a soul split into two opposing parts; rather, they describe the possibilities and actualities of the soul as it journeys through life seeking in the temporal world reflections of the divine spark that is the soul's essence. Blake makes us aware of the soul's divinity in the Songs of Innocence through his depiction of children. Such poems as "The Lamb" and "Infant Joy" demonstrate that joy, delight, love, and unity permeate the world of innocence. The children of this world are at one with God, and their oneness is so powerful it can transform even misery and despair as we see in the poems "The Chimney Sweep" and "Holy Thursday."

But man cannot remain in the world of innocence forever. Sexual maturity signals his entry into the world of experience. He has reached the age of accountability. The world of experience is filled with misery, terror, cruelty and repression. Repression has been institutionalized Blake states in his poem "London." Church, school, government, and society's false morality combine to suppress man's innate joy and desire. Guilt and repression poison love, pervert sex, and corrupt virtue. The power of guilt and repression to pervert is demonstrated forcefully in poems like "The Sick Rose" and "The Poison Tree." Man is caught in a world of despair. He loses his sense of oneness with God and can no longer see the divinity that surrounds him. Blake carefully makes us aware that the characteristics of experience that block man's perception of divinity are inventions of man's mind. They veil

the world of innocence, but the world's and mankind's divinity has not been destroyed by experience; it is only hidden by man's perversity.

In order for man to restore his perception of divinity, he must integrate the worlds of innocence and experience. He cannot return to the innocent state, divine but unaware of his own divinity. He must attain knowledge of God while residing in the realm of experience. Many of the Songs of Experience serve to demonstrate the futility of conventional paths to God. We are shown that we cannot perceive God through our senses alone; neither can we know Him through reason or asceticism or conventional religion. These false paths to knowledge only widen the chasm between man and God.

Blake suggests that in order to restore the world's divinity, man must achieve a new level of consciousness, a state of wise innocence. The speakers of many of the Songs of Innocence have attained this state of combined wisdom and innocence. The piper/poet of the "Introduction," the mother of "A Cradle Song," and the speaker of "The Lamb" and "The Shepherd" are adults; but these wise innocents, though of the adult world of experience, see the divinity of child, man and nature. They are not the jaded and guilt-ridden adults of the Songs of Experience who see only misery and despair.

Blake suggests, through the character of the wise innocent, that we can approach God and restore the world's divinity through the power of our creative energy. The wise innocent speaker/poets of the Songs of Innocence have created in their songs a divine and perfect world; they have the power to transform the world of experience. It is the creative act that mirrors God's

own creation of the world. The essence of the world is created by God's idea of the world. If man can display a corresponding creativity, as do the wise innocents of Blake's Songs of Innocence and of Experience, he has the power to transform the world of experience into the world of innocence where one can reside in unity with all things.

The Songs of Innocence and of Experience by William Blake is a unique poetical experience. The most obvious exceptional quality is Blake's interweaving of poem and engraving. It is, as Northrop Frye points out, "one of the few successful combinations of two arts by one master in the world."[1] It could be argued that a full understanding of the poetry cannot be had unless the engraving is taken into account. Lack of expertise and the limitation of theme have caused me to ignore the colorful engravings, but I do not believe that the discussion will suffer from the exclusion of the engravings. The poems stand independent of the engravings although I am obviously only addressing myself to part of this work of art.

Blake's songs are an attempt to describe the condition of the human soul as it journeys through life. The poet divides the journey into two parts, innocence and experience. We are born first into a world of innocence. As children, the divine character of the soul is evident. Children are at one with nature and with God. The best symbol for the unity of child, nature and God is Blake's use of the lamb. Blake's children possess both the ignorant, guiltless innocence of the lamb as animal and the divinity of the Lamb as son of God.

The divine quality of the children creates a corresponding quality of joy. The children's joyous divinity enables them to transform the world in which they live. The children act to satisfy their desires, self-centered though they may be, and the gratification of those desires brings the children joy. The children, in this way, create a joyful, benevolent world.

But the child's world of joy, delight and love that Blake describes in the Songs of Innocence gives way to the world of experience, a world full of misery, terror and cruelty. Man is made to believe, through various agents of repression, that his joys and desires are evil; self-gratification of natural desires is condemned, and he is made to feel guilty. The advent of guilt and repression acts as a veil separating man from God. Man can no longer act directly and openly to fulfill his desires and bring himself the joy he knew as a child. He is now in conflict with those desires; man is turned in upon himself, and the evil he sees within himself stains his vision of the world. For every desire fulfulled and joy expressed in the Songs of Innocence, there is a corresponding desire perverted and misery created in the Songs of Experience.

The world of innocence is, indeed, in conflict with the world of experience. Blake's subtitle to the Songs of Innocence and of Experience states that the poems demonstrate "the Two Contrary States of the Human Soul."[2] For every truth revealed in the Songs of Innocence, there exists its antithesis in the Songs of Experience. Pity is seen as a human manifestation of God's love in the Songs of Innocence, but in Blake's Songs of Experience pity is a manifestation of the cruelty of man. In the state of innocence, love is selfless and healing, but in experience love is selfish and hurtful. Contraries like these not only describe the paradox of life but also create a tension in Blake's poetry that prods the reader to look for a resolution of conflict either in the reader's own mind or in the poetry itself. It is the conflict inherent in Blake's Songs

of Innocence and of Experience and the resulting tension that gives power to Blake's poetry.

At first it would seem Blake has described a world doomed to perpetual and irresolvable conflict, a world in which man is unable to free himself from the contraries of his soul. It is my contention, however, that Blake does suggest a way out of the conflict. Blake does this first by demonstrating the futility of conventional methods by which man tries to resolve the conflict of innocence and experience. Reason and conventional morality are among the false and ultimately futile paths that Blake believes lead nowhere; instead of resolving the conflict, they deepen it. While warning us of these and other false paths, Blake scatters throughout the Songs of innocence and of Experience the suggestion that it is creative power that can lead man out of the duality of innocence and experience and into a third state which I call wise innocence. Wise innocence is a synthesis of the states of innocence and experience; it is not a return to the state of childhood in which man is self-centered and ignorant of his divinity but rather a step forward through creative action into a totally new state of awareness. The wise innocent is not only divine but aware of his own divinity. He is aware also of the pitfalls of experience, but his sense of his own divinity gives him the strength to overcome those pitfalls and to transform the world of experience.

The key to transforming the world lies in the creative act. The idea that the creative force is the synthesizing power which liberates us from life's contraries is based in Blake's larger idea of the imagination. Blake developed

his complex concept of imagination in the prophetic works which he wrote concurrently with the Songs of Innocence and of Experience. In the prophecies Blake attempted to establish a system of symbols for a new mythology. In order to communicate his complex ideas, Blake ignored both rhyme and meter in the prophecies and spoke, instead, didactically in free verse. The Songs of Innocence and of Experience, however, is not a treatise of Blake's philosophy but a poetic statement of the soul's condition. The simple rhyme and meter of these poems reach the reader on an immediate and personal level. Thus, Blake's development of the power of the creative act in the Songs of Innocence and of Experience does not involve the larger and more complex idea of imagination that Blake elucidated in his prophecies. I intend to explore in this paper Blake's concept of the creative act only as it is revealed in the Songs of Innocence and of Experience even though it is developed more fully in the prophetic works.

In attempting to elucidate Blake's world view as manifested in the Songs of Innocence and of Experience, only a part of the power of these songs has been dealt with. Blake's songs, with their simple, poignant charm, speak to us directly. They can be understood on a purely emotional level, yet to understand intellectually their meaning enriches the poetry. The Songs of Innocence and of Exprience demonstrates Blake's magnificent ability to transform his ideas, unique and radical as they may be, into beautiful and simple lyric statements.

Each of the poems of Songs of Innocence and Experience reveals at least one facet of Blake's concept of innocence, experience, and the state of wise innocence. The poems are not organized as I have organized Blake's

ideas in the above outline. To rearrange the poems to conform to my outline is tempting but would be mistake because the poems are arranged to complement and contrast each other. It is best to discuss the poems in the order in which they were arranged by their author. In this way, we can explore the world of innocence before continuing on to the world of experience. Because I deal primarily with ideas rather than questions of form, there is some redundancy of theme in the discussions of individual poems. Each poem does present itself uniquely, however, and when reading the poems, themselves, redundancy of theme is never tiresome.

In the "Introduction" to the Songs of Innocence, the piper is inspired by a vision of a divine child. The vision of the child sitting on a cloud points out the power of creativity in Blake's world because the child urges the piper to express his own divinity through the creative act of writing poetry. It is the piper/poet who will create for us the world of innocence. His ability to bring joy illustrates his innocence, but his ability to describe that state of innocence indicates that he is not ignorant of his own divine and innocent nature as are the children of Songs of Innocence. The piper/poet is neither an ignorant innocent nor a guilt-ridden adult; he has reached a state of wise innocence through the creative ability he demonstrates in the writing of these songs.

The piper/poet is told that the subject of his poetry is to be "A Lamb," (pg. 51) the capitalization indicating the Lamb is divine, more specifically the Lamb of God which is Jesus Christ. The specificity connoted by the capital "L"

is contrasted to the generality suggested by the indefinite article "a." Blake uses this technique often, and it can be said to demonstrate the idea of the correspondence of all things, the one in the many and the many in the one. The Lamb is both the Lamb of God, Jesus the perfect man, and the common animal which is no less perfect in its numerousness. One can see the symbolic relationship in the quality of the Lamb and a lamb.

The divine child as muse instructs the poet first to pipe, then sing, then write his works. The child responds to the "plesant glee," "merry chear" and "happy chear" (pg. 51) qualities of the poet by weeping with joy, indicating that joy is the central condition of innocence. The poet indicates his art is a natural one as he chooses "a rural pen" (pg. 52) whose audience is those who are innocent, whether child or adult.

Inspired to write a song about a Lamb, the poet responds with "The Shepherd." He is not being contrary but rather illuminating the relationship between lamb and shepherd. Again we see Blake's unusual use of capitalization; "Shepherd" is capitalized to evoke the idea of Christ the divine Shepherd, but the personal pronoun "he" is not capitalized. The Shepherd, as is suggested by the uncapitalized "he," is like the sheep in that he is part of their mortal world. Like them, he is a follower and "he strays." (pg. 52) But the Shepherd is also unlike his sheep in that he has attained a state of self-awareness. He recognizes his own and the sheep's divinity; he praises the sheep as God is praised because he realizes in their "innocent call" and "tender reply" (pg. 52) the qualities of divine innocence. The Shepherd, then, is a wise

innocent because he is aware of the divine qualities of his sheep and is, at the same time, humble enough to emulate them. As a wise innocent, the Shepherd protects the innocent, "He is watchful while they are in peace." (pg. 52)

"The Ecchoing Green" symbolizes the correspondence of all things. The children's laughter is, one can imagine, returned to them by the echoing green just as the birds respond to the bells. The suggestion of a cycle begun with the rising sun is reinforced by the mention of both spring and age. With the introduction of time, we find the power and nature of innocence more clearly defined. Its power is of joy and it is regenerative as is seen by the reaction of Old John who "does laugh away Care" (pg. 52) in the second stanza. There is, too, in the second stanza, a revealing point of view. The speaker, who we must assume is the poet, includes himself as part of the group of children. The old folks, "They laugh at <u>our</u> play," (pg. 52) thus reinforcing the idea that the poet is a wise innocent who is, as a result of his wisdom and innocence, able to have a vision of divine innocence as well as be an integral part of that innocence. Like the Shepherd of the preceding poem and the poet/piper of the "Introduction," the speaker of "The Ecchoing Green" is both divine and aware of that divinity.

The cycle begun in the first stanza is concluded in stanza three, brought about by the dissolution of joy, as "the little ones weary, no more to be merry." (p. 53) The disappearance of the children's joy changes the spiritual Sun of the first stanza into a natural sun. The correspondence of child, God, and nature has ended because the children are not birds but only "<u>like</u> birds in

their nest." (pg. 53) The poem's speaker, who, we must remember, is one of the group of children, has gone inside with the children; his vision of divinity has ended. The 'darkening green," (pg. 53) emptied of children and poet, is no longer transformed by the power of their divine innocence.

Another point brought up in "The Ecchoing Green" is the similarity of divine and maternal love. When darkness breaks the bond between the children and the green, they rush to their mothers' sides for security and "rest." (pg. 53) Maternal love is, throughout the Songs of Innocence, the nearest earthly manifestation of God's love. The children are drawn to their mothers' sides as they are drawn to the green because both display a divine essence.

In "The Lamb" the Little Lamb, being both singular and capitalized, is of God and divine innocence. As an innocent, the lamb is ignorant of its divine nature. When asked if it knows its maker, the lamb cannot answer. It is the poem's speaker, as wise innocent, who recognizes in the lamb's "clothing of delight" and "tender voice" (pg. 53) its divinity. It is he who names the lamb's and his own creator. "I a child and thou a lamb,/We are called by his name." (pg. 53)

In "The Little Black Boy" Blake adds the social theme of racism to his poetry. For Blake the world of man cannot be separated from that of God. The Black Boy takes the place of the poet/piper as the wise innocent speaker of the poem. The Black Boy's "soul is white" (pg. 54) because he has learned at his mother's side the true nature of the world. She begins in stanza three by saying that God is the sun whose light permeates all things. His mother explains

that it is our job to learn to "bear the beams" (pg. 54) of God's love, and, by doing so, the veil will be removed between God and man. The Black Boy knows that "These Black bodies and this sunburned face is but a cloud and like a shady grove," (pg. 54) and his mother assures him that he will rejoice like a lamb in God's presence. The world, it is suggested here, is a reflection of God and we may know Him directly; He is veiled only by man's imperfect vision. By realizing the illuminating power of love, the veil can be cleared away and we may commune directly with God.

Why is the Black Boy the chosen one to lead the white boy to God? Perhaps because being born in the southern wild, he is closer to the natural world than the white boy who has placed an artificial environment between himself and the natural world. But more importantly, it is because the Black Boy has the quality of humility. He does not possess the self importance that elevates one race above another. Perhaps he has learned his humility through the suffering he has had to endure because of racism. Suffering often does have a positive quality in Songs of Innocence. Sorrow and joy equally enrich the spirit. The capacity to feel sorrow indicates a reciprocal capacity for joy. And when sorrow finds expression in pity, it indicates a love of man which mirrors God's divine love. The last stanza reinforces our idea of the Black Boy's humble and selfless love. After giving the white boy the gift of God, he imagines that he will "stand and stroke his silver hair/And be like him and he will then love me." (pg. 54) The poem's last line is obviously ironic; it is the white boy who must learn to emulate the black one.

In the twelve short lines of "The Blossom," Blake reveals the essence of life in nature. The Blossom's ability to both see and hear demonstrates most powerfully the correspondence of all things in nature, even skirting close to the ludicrous. The Blossom does not distinguish between the emotions of joy in the "Merry Sparrow" (pg. 55) and the sorrow of "Sobbing Robin" (pg. 55) because in the ideal state of innocence the emotion of sorrow is not an indication of unhappiness. The poem is saved from being ludicrous by the fact that it is not the Blossom who speaks but an ambiguous figure. The image "my bosom" (pg. 55) strongly suggests that the speaker is a maternal force, and it is this maternal figure who feels the relationship between birds and Blossom. The poem speaks of her vision. It is she who recognizes the divinity of natural objects like the Sparrow, Robin and Blossom. Her ability to see God in these innocents of nature elevates her above them. She is a wise innocent, and it is her combination of wisdom and innocence, her ability to "see," that has allowed her to create the poem "The Blossom."

Not only does innocence have the power to inspire the creative act, it also has the power to transmute evil. It is suggested in "The Black Boy" when his subservient racial status brings him closer to an understanding of God. In "The Chimney Sweeper" the power of innocence to transmute evil is the central theme.

Tom Dacre with his white hair 'curl'd like a lamb's back" (pg. 55) has a dream that follows traditional Christian doctrine. His innocent state delivers him from the miseries of a chimney sweep with a promise of eternal joy after

death. The Angel "opened the coffins & set them all free" (pg. 55) enabling Tom and the other sweeps to "rise upon clouds and sport in the wind." (pg. 56) The heavenly vision brings with it the promise of eternal joy in the last two lines of stanza five. It would seem redundant to the vision already described except that it presents a condition to the reward--that Tom must "be a good boy." (pg. 56) The promise in the vision transforms the earthly world for Tom and allows him to be "happy and warm" (pg. 56) in the cold morning.

The salvation of Tom Dacre seems naive and simple-minded, especially to those cynics who would question the power of a heavenly vision to transform the very real misery of Tom's earthly life. But to question Tom's earthly salvation is to miss the overpowering irony that pervades the poem. Blake saves the innocent in order to indict the experienced. Stanza one, line four, lays the responsibility on the reader. The last two lines of stanza two distill the ironic essence of the poem. The consolation for Tom's loss of curly white hair, the symbol of his innocence, is that it cannot now be spoiled by the soot of the chimneys he must sweep. The reader must be careful not to cloud the irony with a cynical interpretation. Tom's innocence does save him from the miseries of his profession. According to traditional Christian doctrine he is not of the age of accountability. It is the reader who is held accountable as is demonstrated in the last line, "So if all do their duty they need not fear harm." (pg. 56) The feeling that Tom Dacre is being duped into happiness by a fairy-tale vision is turned ironically around, and we realize that it is we who are responsible for Tom's plight and must respond to it.

Like Tom Dacre the little boy of "The Little Boy Lost" and "The Little Boy Found" is rescued from the misery of his condition by the power of his innocence. In the first poem the boy is totally lost. There is no indication of the existence of a father except in the mind of the child. This lack of a father makes the boy's misery that much more pathetic. The last two lines of the poem are extremely ambiguous. They seem to indicate that the weeping causes "the vapour" (pg. 56) to disappear. The vapor, like the veil mentioned in the discussion of "The Little Black Boy," seems to represent the barrier between man and God. In "The Little Boy Lost" elemental suffering serves as a kinetic power that breaks down the barrier. Suffering, signified by the child's weeping, causes a clearing of vision as if in preparation for the appearance of God, the little boy's divine Father.

The ambiguity of the last two lines of "Lost" are repeated in the first two lines of "The Little Boy Found." The image of the "wandering light" (pg. 56) is without significance unless the weeping of the first poem, which chases away the vapor, lets in the light of the second poem. This interpretation is strengthened by the last two lines of stanza one. As in the end of "Lost," crying in "The Little Boy Found" generates action, the actual appearance of God. God appears "like his father in white," (pg. 56) taking on the traditional image to fulfull the little boy's idea of the father he has been seeking. Blake believes that on earth maternal love is the closest we can come to experiencing God. It is fitting, then, that God returns the little lost boy to his mother, whose love mirrors God's own.

As with "The Blossom," the critic runs the risk of making too much of "Laughing Song." The poem does demonstrate the reciprocity of joy. Joy is found both in nature, as indicated in stanza one by the laughter of wood and stream, and in the individual, as indicated by the voicing of "Ha, Ha, He" (pg. 57) in the last two lines of stanzas three and four. The character of joy is not dual but rather reciprocal as these lines from stanza two indicate: "When the air does laugh with our merry wit,/And the green hill laughs with the noise of it." (pg. 57)

"The Painted Bird," (pg. 57) found in stanza four of "Laughing Song," is a troublesome image in that it is as ambiguous as the vanishing vapor of "The Little Boy Lost." It is a strange image for Blake because it is unnatural. A painted bird is an artifact, not a natural object. Perhaps Blake uses this image to emphasize God's creative energy; the world and all its inhabitants are creations of God. It is the act of creation that man must emulate if the unity of man, God, and nature expressed in this poem is to be achieved.

We have seen the power of innocence to transform the misery of this world. The innocence of Tom Dacre and "The Little Black Boy" enable them to rise above their situations. In "A Cradle Song" Blake describes that power with an uncommon word that stands out in the common language of these poems. That word is "beguile." (pg. 57) The verb is used not to connote delusion or guile but as Webster defines its tertiary meaning, "to cause to vanish unnoticed without pain." It is the ultimate enemy--death--that innocence beguiles. Death is the ulitmate veil between man and reality. Blake uses innocence as it is

symbolized in Christianity to dispel this last illusion. Sleep and night with their death connotations are transformed by the innocent child and his mother. To the child the "Sweet dreams form a shade," (pg. 57) evoking the idea of the veil or boundary between reality and our perception of it. It is the mother, however, who is the wise innocent, exhibiting Blake's highest state of knowing. As speaker she sees the child's innocence (and ignorance), the veil, and the divine nature of these symbols. They are an "infant crown" and "an angel mild." (pg. 57) As seer she realizes the power of delight the child is experiencing in its reverie, and her delight (line ten), her smiles, enable the mother to "beguile" (pg. 57) the night or death just as her child's innocence allows it to sleep through the night.

Once "all of creation slept and smiled." (pg. 58) This realization of man's initial innocence brings tears to the mother's eyes. Her weeping is not a sign of misery, however, but an example of the recurring Blakean idea that in innocence the distinctions between sorrow and joy disappear. Mother has drawn back the veil between man and God, and she can see His "holy image" (pg. 58) in the baby's face. She realizes that her love for her child is a felt symbol of God's love for man and that, through that love, she can experience the relationship between God and man. She is a wise innocent, and she understands the power that love wields to beguile heaven and earth to peace.

Just as the mother of "A Cradle Song" knows God's love through her relationship to her babe so we may know God's love by experiencing its manifestation on earth. Mercy, pity, peace and love--these are the real hierophants

of God. They bring us joy; they are "virtues of delight." (pg. 58) Blake states boldly in stanza two of "The Divine Image" that these virtues are of both God and man. Man can only know God as he is manifested in the world. And since these virtues are symbols of God's love, we can know Him by experiencing them.

"The Divine Image" is an optimistic statement of one of the basic tenets of Blake's world view. It suggests that since we can only know what is similar to ourselves and since we realize the existence of God, there must be in us something of God's essence. We are made in His image. If we feel the virtues described in "The Divine Image" and are led by them, we will be able to realize God's immanence. And He resides not in the doctrines of organized religion, but in the world at large, the world of the "heathen, Turk, or Jew." (pg. 59)

Like "The Black Boy" and "The Chimney Sweep," the poem "Holy Thursday" is concerned with the power of innocence to beguile evil. It is the innocence of the children, constantly stressed, that transforms their poverty and abandonment into an affirmation of joy. These innocents reside in nature as the sheep and children of "The Ecchoing Green" were an integral part of nature. The children are compared to the Thames, flowers, lambs, wind and thundering. They are not accountable for their unfortunate situation. Like the lamb, they are unaware of their maker because they are of Him. They sit "with radiance all their own," (pg. 59) and they commune in song directly with heaven.

It is not only the children's innocence which transforms the world of "Holy Thursday" but also the speaker's pity for the children's plight. The

poem's speaker urges us to "cherish pity, lest you drive an angel from your door." (pg. 59) If we view the children with pity, we are led to that which is divine in us. Although outside the church the children are led by "aged, wise men," (pg. 59) inside God's house the children rise above the men. Wisdom is replaced by the power of the children's divine innocence to elicit pity, a quality more valuable and divine than all the old men's wisdom. We must look to the children and the divine virtue pity, then, to lead us to God.

In the poem "Night" Blake describes the world in what can be seen as a traditional Christian manner. As night sets in, the guiltless, innocent creatures seek shelter as does the poem's speaker. Yet the night is transformed by the moon's "silent delight" (pg. 59) to a world of benevolence which is administered by the angels who "pour blessing/And Joy without ceasing" (pg. 60) on all the creatures. Even the angels cannot keep the natural order in abeyance; the lambs are eaten by the lions only to be immediately escorted to heaven where lamb and lion can at last lie down together. The poem gives us two other insights into Blake's view of the world of innocence besides the traditional Christian one already discussed. First, the speaker must yield to the rules of nature just as the other creatures do. His position as wise innocent does not elevate him above the laws of nature. Second, the innocents have the quality of thoughtlessness (i.e. "They look in every thoughtless nest" (pg. 60)), perhaps connoting simply that they are asleep but more probably suggesting that there is the necessary quality of ignorance in their innocence. The innocents are an integral part of nature. Self-consciousness has not separated

them from the world, a condition which will be lost in the Songs of Experience.

The lion in the poem "Night" displays the characteristics of a wise innocent. He immediately feels pity for the sheep, and pity, we have learned in "The Divine Image," is a reflection in man of God's love. As a wise innocent, the lion has passed through both the state of innocence and the state of experience. He is not placed in a "thoughtless nest" (pg. 60) with the poem's innocents; he has been "washed in life's river" (pg. 61) which runs through the world of experience and into heaven. As a wise innocent the lion is able to synthesize the contraries of earthly life. He sees the unity of apparent opposites. Wrath, he states, has in it the quality of meekness and in its destructive force there is a cleansing action.

In "Spring" the cyclic quality of the seasons is linked with the innocent and wise innocent states of being. The poem is apocalyptic. The flute is muted in stanza one, signaling that the work of the piper/poet is almost over. The birds now "delight/Day and night" (pg. 61) because it is no longer necessary for them to seek their nests in fear of natural law. The cock crowing in stanza two is the same cock that crowed at the crucifixion of Christ and is a sign that man now has the opportunity to ascend to the kingdom of God. In the final stanza the promise of the crucifixion and ascension is delivered. The Lamb, capitalized to connote its divinity, and the piper/poet speaker of the poem are one in God's love.

"Nurse's Song" bears a close resemblance to "The Ecchoing Green" already discussed. The joy of the children brings happiness to the nurse as

it did to Old John, but the nurse recognizes a finer quality in the children's joy. Their joy brings a "rest within my breast" (pg. 62) and a stillness that is more powerful than Old John's sentimental remembrances. It is a state of being that is powerful enough to stop the world. The nurse sees only the joy of the children. But even in her understanding of the children's joy, which seems to have the quality of a mystical experience, she is not an integral part of nature, for she does not see the signs of nature. The children are responsive to the signs of nature. They are as the birds and sheep of stanza three. Their very beings are reflected by their surroundings. "The little ones leaped & shouted & laughed/And all the hills echoed." (pg. 62)

The power of joy that the nurse felt is evident in the poem "Infant Joy." The infant is but two days old, yet he realizes his condition. The speaker is responsive to the child and realizes Joy is its rightful name. His realization of the child's condition unites speaker and child.. "Thou does smile/I sing the while." (pg. 62) One worrisome aspect of the poem is the infant's own ability to recognize his joyful quality. Until now all of Blake's innocents have been unaware of their own natures because to become aware would separate them from the world. The difference in "Infant Joy" is that the child is "but two days old" (pg. 62); his awareness is symbolic not actual. There is an apparent contradiction in the poem that seems to extend the symbolic awareness. The infant states in the first line of the poem that he has no name, but when asked only two lines later what he should be called, he answers, "Joy is my name." (pg. 62) One must remember that it is the piper/poet who is recounting this

experience, not the infant himself or the infant's mother. The piper/poet speaker of the poem and the child have become one, and the poet has the creative ability to put words in the mouths of infants in order to make his point.

At first glance the poem "A Dream" seems a humble children's rhyme about a lost ant being led home by the "watchman of the night," (pg. 63) a little glow-worm. Indeed, Blake strove for this artless simplicity as an indication of the child's innocent nature. There are unique qualities of the poem that give it depth and help illuminate Blake's world. The dream "weaves a shade" (pg. 63) over the speaker as it did in "A Cradle Song." The shade is a symbol for the barrier between God and our perception of Him. This simple tale must be told as a dream, again suggesting the real and perceived quality of the world. The dream technique also saves the poem from being ludicrous. As in "The Little Boy Lost" the theme is separation of parent and child, and again the scene is transformed when the plight of the unfortunate ant strikes pity in the heart of the speaker. The divine virtue of pity transforms the scene in a fantastic manner with the introduction of the glow-worm as guide to the ant.

The theme of empathy in "A Dream" is continued in "On Another's Sorrow," the last of the poems of innocence. The poem creates a continuum of feeling from simple to complex. Stanza one concerns the empathy of man for man. Stanza two concerns a father's empathy for his child, and stanza three concerns a mother's empathy for her child. Stanza four seems to indicate God's empathy for all living things, but the uncapitalized "he" (pg. 64) must be taken to mean humanity as a whole and thus recognizes the potential of the human

form to empathize with all of nature.

Stanza seven links the seeming contraries of joy and sorrow and places them at the center of God's love:

> He doth give his joy to all;
> He becomes an infant small;
> He becomes a man of woe;
> He doth feel the sorrow too! (pg. 64)

As a manifestation of God's love, both joy and sorrow can lead us to Him. The empathic feeling is, we have seen, a power throughout the Songs of Innocence. It can beguile evil. It is a virtue that transforms the lives of the orphans of "Holy Thursday" and the emmet of "A Dream." Yet it is a virtue of delight, not that pity is delightful, but that it springs from delight or joy. Joy and weeping, two contraries constantly linked, are both a part of the world of these songs. Joy soothes weeping and weeping makes joy soothing. "He gives to us joy" (pg. 64) by sitting beside us and moaning.

Blake has established in the Songs of Innocence the essential divinity of man. Poems like "The Ecchoing Green" and "Nurse's Song" illustrate the divine correspondence of God and man. The child is born into the world innocent and divine, at one with God and nature. But the child, as innocent, is unaware of both the world's and his own divinity; like God's other innocent creatures, the "Little Lamb" (pg. 53) and birds in their nest," (pg. 53) the child lacks self-consciousness.

Although the subject of the Songs of Innocence is always a child, his counterpart from nature, or the divine virtues of pity and mercy he elicits in

others, he rarely serves as a poem's primary speaker. Because he lacks the self-awareness necessary to separate himself from the world, the child is unable to describe it. He cannot conceptualize his own divinity. Instead of children, the speakers of the Songs of Innocence, whether the piper/poet of the "Introduction," the mother of "Infant Joy," or the maternal force of "The Blossom," are wise innocents. Like the children about whom they write, the wise innocent speakers of the poems display the essential divinity of man, and the world they create in their songs is a perfect reflection of God. But unlike the children, the wise innocents of the Songs of Innocence are self-aware. Not only are they divine, but they are conscious of that divinity. It is the power of this self-knowledge that gives the wise innocents the ability to create through poetry the divine world represented in the Songs of Innocence.

In the Songs of Experience the focus shifts from the child's world of innocence to the adult world of experience. The world of experience, as we shall see, is quite different from the divine, benevolent and joyous world of innocence. The speaker of the "Introduction" to the Songs of Experience is not the wise innocent piper/poet who was inspired by a Divine Child to bring joy to the world. The speaker is a Bard, a man of exalted stature, who seems to have the power of prophecy. He "present, past and future sees," (pg. 65) and his "ears have heard/The Holy Word" (pg. 65) with its implied promise of absolute power, the ability to "control/That starry pole." (pg. 65) The Bard is called upon to use his powers to rejuvenate the "lapsed soul" (pg. 65) and to restore the "fallen light." (pg. 65) Clearly this world of experience is one

in need of salvation, and though the Bard has the power to restore it, we see in his very power the causes of the world's condition. He is trapped in a linear conception of time with present, past and future; the word-power he has knowledge of is not his own but belongs to an ancient time. Thus when he asks the world to renew itself, to "arise" (pg. 65) from its slumber, the poet's appeal for order in the chaos of nature can only be met with disappointment. To stop the "starry pole" (pg. 65) is an impossibility. It is necessary to accept the cyclic quality of nature which must turn away into darkness and death in order to renew itself.

Earth speaks from the chaos, "from the darkess dread & drear," (pg. 65) in "Earth's Answer" saying that she is imprisoned by man's jealousy. It is man's suppression of desire, delight and joy that has perverted innocence and caused chaos.

> Can delight,
> Chained in night,
> The virgins of youth and morning bear? (pg. 66)

It is impossible for innocence (virgins of youth) or light (morning) to survive in such a state. It is unnatural to suppress delight. The earth gives of itself joyously and unashamedly.

> Does spring hide its joy
> When buds and blossoms grow?
> Does the sower
> Sow by night,
> Or, the plowman in darkness plow? (pg. 66)

Clearly there is a connotation of sexual delight in Blake's images of sower and plowman. Man's imprisonment of desire is as unnatural and absurd as a

plowman working in darkness. The last stanza shows the way out of the chains and suggests hope that it is possible to break the bonds of repression in order to free divine love. "Break this heavy chain . . ./That free Love with bondage bound." (pg. 66)

With the entreaty by nature to free love, Blake immediately delves into love's nature in "The Clod and the Pebble." The poet chooses the clod as a symbol of selfless love; a more appropriate representative could not be found. The humble earth, giver of life, speaks from under cattle's feet telling us that love is completely selfless, even to the point of building a "heaven in hell's despair." (pg. 66)

The pebble, inert, takes the opposite view and from the brook describes love as completely selfish, seeking only to "bind another to It's delight," (pg. 66) building "a Hell in Heaven's despite." (pg. 66) The poem is a perfectly balanced dialectic, a dualism which gives the reader some clue to Blake's idea of the nature of love. Love is a unifying joyous power; it resides in neither the clod's nor the pebble's attitudes. By breaking up the idea of love into balanced opposing forces, one has lost love's unifying power and thrown the world into chaos. Can love survive the clod's definition if there is no one to receive love? Why, one might ask the pebble, would love choose another as a love object if only self-love were the motive. Both the clod's and the pebble's idea of love are shown to be illogical in the last line of each of their stanzas. Hell's despair is the fertile ground of selfless love only if the lover is made miserable by self-hatred. Binding, selfish love turns heaven into hell; it creates "a Hell in

Heaven's despite." (pg. 66) Clearly both these ideas of love are wrong.

The major difference between the "Holy Thursday" of Songs of Innocence and that of Songs of Experience is in point of view. The speaker of the latter poem is an adult, the Bard of the "Introduction" to Songs of Experience, not the wise innocent poet of the earlier poem. Although the Bard speaks with clarity and truth concerning the plight of the orphans in "Holy Thursday," he cannot understand their joy. Their song is reduced to a "trembling cry." (pg. 67) For although the children may be able to transform their world through the exercise of their joyous imaginations, the adult has no such facility. He must see the "babes reduced to poverty" (pg. 67) and despair. The cruel injustice of the innocent orphans' plight in a land of plenty creates a paradox in the mind of the Bard that is difficult, if not impossible, for him to resolve. There can be no happiness, no spring for the children of the "Holy Thursday" of Songs of Experience for "it is eternal winter there." (pg. 67) Only in a land of bounty where "the sun does shine" and "the rain does fall/Babe can never hunger there." (pg. 67) Only in a land without winter where nature is benevolent can the children be properly cared for. Blake makes the point most forcefully that the misery of the children is the responsibility of the adult world of experience. It is the adult's duty to change the world. The children's joy may transform the world for them, but their misery transforms it in quite the opposite way for the adults.

In "The Little Girl Lost" and "The Little Girl Found" is a most beautiful and lucid description of the two conditions of life--innocence and experience,

contrary states of the human soul. "The Little Girl Lost" could easily be placed in the Songs of Innocence except that it is Blake's intent to show both states of the soul, and thus "The Little Girl Lost" and its companion poem, "Little Girl Found," are placed together. In "The Little Girl Lost" we are made aware that the condition of the world is a fallen one. The earth is asleep, robbed of its divinity by man. The earth's "grave . . . sentence" is obviously death. The two poems become the symbol by which the poet can foretell the time when divinity will be restored, when "the desart wild" will "Become a garden mild." (pg. 67) Blake points the way to the restoration of the world's divinity in the story of Lyca and her parents; he suggests that, through love, both Lyca and her parents can attain oneness with God. Lyca is a child of nature, at ease in her wild surroundings. Her only concern is her parents' anguish since they cannot understand her communion with nature, and she prays for a sign that, if her parents are worried, she may not sleep her "sweet sleep." (pg. 67) As she sleeps, the lion comes and takes Lyca into his kingdom; she abandons her only vestige of the fallen world, her "slender dress." (pg. 68) Lyca, as an innocent, is at one with nature. She does not fear the natural world and is accepted into it without incident.

Lyca's parents, as members of the adult world of experience, have a more difficult time in becoming part of the natural world. Their sorrow makes "the desart weep," (pg. 69) and when finally confronted by the symbol of natural order, the lion, they are struck down. Although they are members of the adult world of experience, their love of Lyca has been their guiding emotion

and, only because of it, they are accepted into the fold.

One cannot dismiss these companion poems without commenting on the Christian symbols which are apparent. Lyca is a virgin, a guiltless innocent, who sees the world, like the children of "The Ecchoing Green," as undistinguished from herself. As an innocent she can be accepted into the kingdom of God without complication. The lion is a symbol not only of natural order but of God and His divine order. He is the lion promised in "Night" of the Songs of Innocence who is transformed by Divine Love into a meek and gentle creature, caretaker of lambs. Lyca's parents realize when they look upon the lion and see "A spirit arm'd in gold./On his head a crown" (pg. 70) that he is divine. It is Lyca's innocence and the power of her parents' love for her that gains them entrance into the kingdom of God.

In the world of the Songs of Experience the emphasis is taken from the innocents themselves, who remain the subject of many of the poems, and placed on the adults who inhabit the world of the Songs of Experience. Such is the case in "The Chimney Sweeper." It is not the sweep's transcendent joy that is stressed but the responsibility for his condition. In fact, it is "Because I was happy upon the heath" (pg. 70) that "they clothed me in the clothes of death." (pg. 70) The sweep's joy creates jealousy in his parents, an emotion that is at the root of evil in the Blakean world. It is this jealousy that drives them to create the child's misery. The parents, however, feel guiltless; the sweep's innocence and joy, even in the midst of his misery, mask his condition and assuages the parents' guilt. Even the little child can see the hypocrisy in their

going "to praise God and his Priest and King/Who make up a heaven in our misery." (pg. 70) As is suggested in this poem and stressed later, the world of experience is miserable and corrupt only because its adult inhabitants have created misery and sin.

The "Nurse's Song" tries to capture the essential qualities of those who are members of the adult world of experience. The nurse is clearly an outsider in the world of innocence. The children's voices are "whisperings" (pg. 70) beyond her hearing and her understanding. Yet the nurse knows the depth, if not the nature, of her loss; remembrance of her youth makes her face turn "green and pale." (pg. 70) The nurse's remembrance cannot be total. She is separated from the state of innocence. Thus she sees the children's lives as "wasted in play." (pg. 70) Adult life is hollow and joyless, with the additional misery that adults feel they must disguise this hollowness. The nurse is to be pitied for her miserable condition.

"The Sick Rose" is a poem which speaks directly and emotionally. It is Blake's most powerful expression of the tragedy of perverted love. The rose is a beautiful image of sexual love. The rose could provide love "a bed of crimson joy," (pg. 71) yet it is love which destroys the rose. What kind of love is this? The answer can be found in the description of that love. It is a "dark secret love" (pg. 71)--a worm's love. The sensual, open sexuality of the flower image is perverted by the fact that the rose is loved by a worm in darkness and in secret. There is, too, the parasitic nature of the worm who, in satisfying his own selfish desires, consumes the rose. It is the selfishness of

his love, like that of the pebble, which destroys love's object.

"The Fly" is a difficult poem because, like the poem "Infant Joy," its simplicity of theme first appears to border on the ludicrous. Is Blake really saying that man and fly are one in God's mind, implied by their both being subject to the "blind hand" (pg. 71) of death? Perhaps, but it is not the characteristic of thought that makes them equals. Blake says in Vala, or The Four Zoas that "everything that lives is human."[3] And in The Marriage of Heaven and Hell at the close of "The Song of Liberty," he states, "everything that lives is holy."[4] The unifying principle between man and Fly, then, is the same as between man and God: there is a spark of God in all living things.

If thought is life
And strength and breath
And the want
Of thought is death

Then am I
A happy fly
If I live
Or if I die. (pg. 72)

The ability to think, or consciousness, is traditionally seen as the critical difference between man and animal. Blake, however, blasts the idea of reducing the distinction between man and fly to one of thought. There is something else, more important than the mere ability to think, that links man and beast. It is the spark of God in all living things.

The theme of sexual love, first introduced in "The Sick Rose," is expanded in "The Angel." The adult must dream of being a "maiden Queen" (pg. 72) in order to return to a state of innocence. Her innocence is not joyful

She is in a state of "witless woe" (pg. 72) which is incapable of being "beguil'd." (pg. 72) This is the first use of the word "beguile" in the Songs of Experience, and it assumes a more sinister meaning here--being tricked or betrayed. Thus, the line "witless woe was ne'er beguil'd" (pg. 72) takes on a facetious tone. Supposedly, the queen's maidenhood cannot be beguiled because she is in a state of unknowing. She is a "witless" (pg. 72) innocent. But the queen's attitude is hypocritical, and we discover she is not an innocent at all. She admits in the last two lines of stanza two that she has knowledge of her hidden desire; it is that which has made her unhappy. "And I wept both night and day,/And hid from him my heart's desire." (pg. 72) If the nature of her desire is unclear in the poem's first two stanzas, the line "Then morning blushed rosey red" (pg. 72) enlightens the reader. The queen's desire is a sexual one, and her fear of that desire, not desire itself, acts as the invisible worm that destroys her love. With "grey hairs" (pg. 72) upon her head she has missed her chance at love.

"The Tyger" asks a series of questions of two kinds: who was the Tyger's creator, and what is the nature of the Tyger? These two questions are interdependent. The poem itself is a series of questions which center on the creator. Who is it that could create such a beast? We know from the first stanza, third line, that the creator is immortal. Surely the Tyger must be the work of God. Only He has the power to create such a creature. We must realize the spirit of evil in things heavenly just as the world of experience exists with the world of innocence. The Tyger is a creature of the dark who lives "in the

forests of the night." (pg. 72) It would seem that the Tyger of experience would destroy the lamb of innocence, returning man to the dark forest of the night, the chaos of "The Introduction" to the Songs of Experience. The Tyger is, however, perfect and beautiful in its symmetry, fearsome though it may be. Although the Tyger must devour the lamb, just as innocence must give way to experience, there is in the creative fire of the forge, which is mirrored in the Tyger's burning eyes, the hope that man may forge a synthesis of innocence and experience.

The theme of corrupted love so eloquently stated in "The Sick Rose" is restated and expanded in several of the later Songs of Experience. In "My Pretty Rose" the consequence of suppresed desire is explored. The speaker is offered "such a flower as May never bore," (pg. 73) and with this line Blake emphasizes the flower's beauty and implies that it is not just a simple flower but a gift of love, perhaps a gift of sexual love. The speaker turns down the gift out of what appears to be the honorable virtue of fidelity to the rose tree he already owns. Fidelity is, the poem suggests, a false virtue. His loyalty and fidelity is, in actuality, possessiveness which breeds the jealousy evident in the reaction of his rose tree. "But my Rose turn'd away with jealousy,/And her thorns were my only delight." (pg. 73)

Perverted desire is also the theme in "Ah! Sun-flower." Rooted in earth, the Sun-flower turns away from its origins and seeks constantly and eternally upward for the "Sun (here capitalized to suggest the son of God)/ Where the traveller's journey is done." (pg. 73) Blake purposely makes this

line sound like a homily to emphasize the Sun-flower's foolishness. The Sun-Flower is a natural symbol for the religious tenet that earthly concerns and desires are to be suppressed in order to obtain a heavenly reward. In actuality, Blake, contends, this sacrifice of desire for the promise of life after death creates death in life. The youth has "pined away with desire" (pg. 73) and the lifeless virgin is "pale" and "shrouded in snow." (pg. 73) They are already in their graves because they have denied themselves for the promise of heaven.

"The Lily" is Blake's final use of the flower as the central symbol of love and beauty in the Songs of Experience. Unlike the rose or sheep, lily gives and receives love openly without the threat of a thorn or horn to "stain her beauty bright." (pg. 74) These defenses parody the false virtues of modesty and restraint.

The "Garden of Love" is an indictment of traditional religion much as "Ah! Sun-flower." In Songs of Innocence "The Ecchoing Green" was a place of joyful play. Sexual maturity has changed that green into a "Garden of Love." As maturity has brought sexual thoughts to mind, social and religious law has brought guilt feelings. These guilt feelings are symbolized by the presence of a church with its logo "'Thou shall not' writ over the door." (pg. 74) The church, with its closed doors, has repressed creative sexuality. The natural regenerative quality of sexual love, symbolized by growing flowers, has been perverted to a desire for life after death. Thus the flowers have been replaced by tombstones, and death has been elevated over life. It is repression of the highest order, vividly emphasized by the image of priests "binding with briars

my joys & desires." (pg. 74)

"The Little Vagabond" displays a quality of gentle satire that is not often seen in Blake's work. Actually, Blake does on occasion place tongue in cheek, especially when dealing with the pomposity of religious institutions or establishment ideas. The child in "The Little Vagabond" speaks almost as a wise innocent of the Songs of Innocence except for his obvious lack of knowledge of his own divinity. He knows of the ale-house as well as the church, and it is made obvious to us which is the better place. The church is cold compared to the healthy, pleasant and warm ale-house. The idea of heaven the child has learned at church is foreign to his feelings of joy when he is at the ale-house. The power of that place is one of unrestricted joy and unrestrained desire. The church has separated man from his desires and robbed him of his joy. Indeed, even the child knows that God would rejoice to see "his children as happy as he." (pg. 75) The experience of joy is an emotion that leads to God, not away from him. This is a point Blake makes clear in the Songs of Innocence and restates here in the character of Dame Lurch. Those who turn away from joy and follow the rules and regulations of the church are mocked in the character of Dame Lurch with her false modesty, "bandy children" (pg. 74) fasting and corporeal punishment. Those who follow their true desires rejoice with God and negate the Devil's power. They have "no more quarrel with the devil" (pg. 75); he can be overcome with the kindness and concern shown him.

In "London" Blake captures the consequences of repressed desire most vividly and fixes the responsibility for the world's condition on man. The

speaker is wandering through "charter'd streets" (pg. 75) along the "charter'd Thames." (pg. 75) The freedom of his wandering is juxtaposed to the restrictive chartered streets and river. All that he sees is misery. The "marks of woe," (pg. 75) the "cry of every man," (pg. 75) and the "Infant's cry of fear" (pg. 75) are without the redeeming quality of human empathy that was so evident in the Songs of Innocence. Even the poem's speaker displays little empathy for the miserable beings that surround him; his tone is, at best, ambivalent. "London"'s cataloged misery is obvious evidence of the outcome of repression. The "ban" (pg. 75) of line three, stanza two, takes on a double meaning; it is both a proclamation of marriage and a taboo or restriction. It is fitting that marriage and taboo are linked, for marriage (and all social institutions) is an example of the repression that has corrupted the world of innocence.

It is important to note that the misery evident in "London" is "mind-forg'd," (pg. 75) for Blake believes that misery is an artificial state created in the mind of the sufferer. Misery is not a quality of nature; it is man who has corrupted the world, not the world that has made man's lot miserable. Man has the ability to alleviate misery but does not; this is a fact which is demonstrated in the last two stanzas of the poem. The church ignores the plight of the chimney sweep even though the soot he sweeps from its chimneys blackens the church's walls. Government ignores the human suffering brought about by war though it is indicted by the blood that runs "down Palace walls." (pg. 75) But the greatest misery is that created by the repression of sexual love and society's myriad taboos, social customs, and laws. Marriage, a sacrament, has made

love a sin by condemning it in all but the married state. The need for prostitution springs from the inability, both in and out of marriage, to experience love freely and without guilt. Social custom and church law have made a mockery of marriage and created the need for the harlot's services. Suppressed desire can only breed misery. The "Harlot's curse" (pg. 75) both actually and symbolically "blasts the new born Infant's tear,/And blights with plagues the marriage hearse." (pg. 75) She is both the actual carrier of syphilis, with its power to deform and kill, and a symbol of repressed desire. What powerful and awesome images those of "London" are. The blackened church wall, the bloody Palace, and the "Marriage hearse" (pg. 75) startle the reader and demonstrate the hypocrisy of social institutions. One must not, however, believe Blake is railing against social determinism. It is in the mind of man, who has separated himself from God, that the roots of these problems lie, and there is the suggestion that they may be corrected there also.

Like "London," "The Human Abstract" also places the origins of misery in the mind of man. The poem abstracts human emotions from the mind's idea of them and, in doing so, destroys those emotions. The first verse is a perfect intellectual argument that is the antithesis of "The Divine Image." The argument that pity and mercy are dependent on others' suffering is based on logic, not human emotion. To accept this argument frees us intellectually from the compelling needs of the poor and miserable. Poverty and misery, looked at in this way, become necessary to the existence of virtue. Cruelty, thus excused, flourishes: "Then Cruelty knits a snare,/and spreads his bait with care." (pg. 75)

It is Cruelty that "spreads the dismal shade/Of Mystery over" (pg. 76) mankind's head, veiling knowledge of God from his sight. Blake sardonically gives the tree that grows from Cruelty's "tears" and "holy fears" (pg. 76) the name "Humility." (pg. 76) Blake's tree of Humility bears rotten "fruit of deceit" (pg. 76), and only the Raven of death will nest in its branches. It is not a tree of knowledge but one of "deceit," (pg. 76) of "thickest shade," (pg. 76) where man's reason produces mystery, not truth, and death instead of life. One cannot find this tree in the natural world. It grows only "in the Human Brain." (pg. 76) And it is in man's brain that the miserable condition of the world of experience is created. Reason, we have seen, cannot break the chains of that misery; it only strengthens them.

In "Infant Sorrow" Blake describes the condition of a child born into the world of experience; this poem presents us with an inversion of the birth of the child of innocence in "Infant Joy." Both children have a clear understanding of the world they are born into though, because the children are mere infants, their understanding is symbolic, not actual. The child of experience is born into a world of human suffering, a "dangerous" (pg. 76) world where birth is without joy. "My mother groaned! My father wept!" (pg. 76) The infant realizes his helpless condition and cries out against it "piping loud." (pg. 76) The last line of stanza one reminds us of the image of the piper and the cloud child of the Songs of Innocence. Instead of a divine child on a cloud, however, we have in the Songs of Experience "a fiend hid in a cloud." (pg. 76) The world of experience has bound up the spirit of the child, and he cannot be free

to play the muse like the divine child of the Songs of Innocence. He must, instead, struggle against all manner of restraints; as an infant, these restraints are his "father's hands" and his "swaddling band." (pg. 76) Throughout his life, we have seen in other of Blake's poems, the child of experience will remain forever restrained, unfree. Though the child of "Infant Sorrow" is struggling against powerful forces and though he ultimately gives up his struggle "to sulk upon" his "mother's breast," (pg. 76) the fact that his instincts are sound gives us hope that there may be a way out of the world of experience.

"A Poison Tree" is another example of the corrupting power of suppressed emotion. Not only is it unhealthy to suppress desire, but it is also unhealthy to suppress anger. We have seen in "Infant Sorrow" that anger itself is not an evil when directed against the forces of suppression. But when it is repressed, anger is a corrupting force. When the speaker of "A Poison Tree" expresses his anger openly, it is dissipated. "I was angry with my friend: / I told my wrath, my wrath did end." (pg. 76) But anger directed against an enemy and not vented grows into a Poison Tree. Suppressed emotion is so corrupting that it can subvert even feelings of joy. The tree is first watered by "fears" and "tears," (pg. 76) but wrath corrupts the speaker and soon care of the plant elicits in him "smiles" and "soft deceitful wiles." (pg. 76) Finally, it so corrupts the speaker that he finds happiness in the death of his enemy. "In the morning glad I see/My foe outstretched beneath the tree." (pg. 77) Blake warns us here that happiness is not always a hierophant of good. In the world of experience even happiness, a mark of divinity in the Songs of Innocence,

can be perverted; it can mask corruption. In this case, wrath becomes corrupted because it is not dissipated. Hidden and nurtured in secret, it becomes a deadly force.

At first glance "A Little Boy Lost" seems a restatement of the pebble's argument in "The Clod and the Pebble." However, the love the Little Boy speaks of (an example, like "The Little Vagabond," of an innocent speaking with wisdom) is not the selfish love that "seeketh only self to please." (pg. 66) Rather he emphasizes that we can know no one as well as we know ourselves. "Nor is it possible to Thought/A greater than itself to know." (pg. 77) Thus, self-love is not selfish. It increases the capacity to love those outside ourselves. Self-respect, to the point of "veneration," (pg. 77) can only lead one to respect others as well as oneself. The boy's argument is one that mystics have always used. As has been stated in the discussion of "The Divine Image," we can only know what is similar to ourselves, and since we have an idea of God, there must be a spark of God's essence in us. To look inward, to love self, is to cultivate that spark, fanning it into a flame that can illuminate God's love in the world at large. By loving ourselves we may love both God, the "Father" (pg. 77) of the poem, and mankind, represented by the little boy's brothers. Finally, our love can permeate all of God's creation: "I Love you like the little bird/That picks up crumbs around the door." (pg. 77)

Such a doctrine, with its supreme logic, is unbearable to the church whose power resides in the veiling of God from man in order to maintain its position as caretaker of His Mysteries. The Church pronounces the boy "a

fiend" who "sets reason up for judge/or our most holy Mysteries." (pg. 77) The child's argument has the power to destroy the guilt associated with self-love, and guilt is the weapon the church uses to control its members. Thus, the little boy is a threat to the church. He is proclaimed a heretic and destroyed. We have seen the infant of "Infant Sorrow" and the children of "London," "Holy Thursday," and "A Chimney Sweeper" sacrificed to the world of experience, and the child of "A Little Boy Lost" meets the same fate: they "burn'd him in a holy place/where many had been burn'd before." (pg. 77)

"A Little Girl Lost" is a straightforward poem that echoes the theme of repressed sexual desire which pervades much of Songs of Experience. The corrupting influence of repressed sexual desire is not emphasized; rather Blake concentrates on the conditions necessary for love to flourish. Clearly the present world of experience cannot nourish love, for at this point "Love! Sweet Love was thought a crime." (pg. 78) Blake does, however, hold out hope that in a "future age" (pg. 78) "youth and maiden," (pg. 78) in God's illuminating presence, can know the delights of divine love. At present it is not possible for the youthful pair to consummate their love, but it is not because their instinctual desires are perverse. They love in a "garden bright" (pg. 78) where they are bathed in pure and "holy light." (pg. 78) Rather, it is because in the world of experience love breeds jealousy before it can be consummated. In this poem jealousy is manifested in the relationship of father and daughter. The sight of her father fills the maiden with guilt: "his loving look,/Like the holy book,/All her tender limbs with terror shook." (pg. 78) She feels as

though she has been unfaithful to him and to the tenets of the Bible. Once again love, guiltless and innocent though it may be, is corrupted by the teachings of the world of experience. The maiden's father is unable to give freely and partake unselfishly of love, and, thus, he is crushed by what he takes for infidelity. The knowledge of his daughter's love for another "shakes the blossoms of my hoary hair." (pg. 78) The father's love for his daughter has sexual overtones, suggested by his extreme jealousy and possessiveness. His love for her is as unnatural and incongruous as the image of blossoms in an old man's white hair. The daughter's youthful love, as well as the father's paternal love, is corrupted by the old man's perverse and unfounded jealousy.

Blake's preoccupation with delight in the body is qualified in "To Tirzah." It is made obvious in the poem and substantiated later in Blake's prophecies that Tirzah is the symbol of corporeality. She is "The Mother of my mortal part." (pg. 79) The first stanza states that all that is of the earth must return to the earth. The poem's speaker asks of corporeality, "Then what have I to do with thee?" (pg. 79) Since the corporeal world offers him no knowledge, no freedom from the earthly cycle of "generation" (pg. 79) and death, he feels it is useless to him. Stanza two states that the sexes "Sprung from shame and pride," (pg. 79) an idea represented in Christianity by the fall from innocence of Adam and Eve. Their pride induced them to eat of the Tree of Knowledge, an act that created not only shame but death. In Blake's poem God's mercy changes "Death into Sleep" (pg. 79); man is not destroyed but sentenced to a world of work and sorrow where he is no longer at one with God. According to Christian

mythology, after the fall man was doomed to a world of corporeality, of "senseless clay." (pg. 79) But Blake makes it clear in "To Tirzah" that the knowledge of God cannot be had through sense experience alone. Only the coming of Jesus restores to man the world of the spirit and offers him hope of transcending the body to see the face of God.

Blake uses the Christian notion of man's fall and his salvation through Jesus Christ to demonstrate his idea that we cannot reach God through the senses alone. Only if man reaches beyond the body can he escape the "Mortal Life" (pg. 79) and attain oneness with God.

"The Schoolboy" speaks to a repression somewhat less severe than the repression of sexual desire, but it is a repression no less devastating in its consequences. The boy is in harmony with nature at the beginning of the poem. "The sky lark sings with me" (pg. 80) he states in stanza one. School, however, takes him away from nature and "drives all joy away," (pg. 80) creating an artificial environment. The boy's natural freedom and joyousness is blighted, for "how can a bird that is born for joy/Sit in a cage and sing?" To be thus caged by the repression and artificiality of school will inevitably destroy the child. He is compared to another creature of the natural world, a plant whose "buds are nip'd/And Blossoms blown away" (pg. 80) leaving it barren and useless.

The tone of "The Voice of the Ancient Bard" is one of hope; the poet here gives advice to the uncorrupted "youth of delight," (pg. 81) the one most able to break free of the bonds that chain man to the misery and ignorance of

the world of experience. This poem strengthens the suggestions made in several other of the Songs of Experience that the children of the world of experience, like those of innocence, are essentially innocent and divine; they are not born corrupt but become corrupted by the world of experience. The youth in this poem is still in touch with his divinity. He is, as yet, uncorrupted. Knowing this, the Bard, with the youth at his side, looks optimistically to the dawn of the "new morn" (pg. 81) which the Bard believes will dispel those things of the world of experience that hide God from man. Doubt, reason, intellectual dispute and artificiality, all false paths to God and to knowledge of man's divinity, lead only to confusion and death, "an endless maze." (pg. 81) Though Blake neglects here to show us the exact path to God, he leaves no doubt in our minds that traditional paths are futile.

Lest the optimism of the preceding poem makes us forget that we are in the realm of experience, Blake ends his songs with a poem that vividly reflects that realm. The divine virtues of Mercy, Pity, Peace, and Love presented in "The Divine Image" of the Songs of Innocence are mocked by their earthly manifestations in "A Divine Image" of the Songs of Experience. Mankind, in the world of experience, is not a reflection of the Divine Idea. Here Cruelty, Jealousy, Secrecy and Terror are human attributes and human creations. They have the power to imprison the spirit, to bind it up in a "dress of iron" (pg. 81) forged in a furnace of mankind's own making.

The Songs of Innocence and of Experience is a description of the contrary states of the human soul. These poems do not describe a soul split

into two opposing parts; rather, they describe the possibilities and actualities of the soul as it journeys through life seeking in the temporal world reflections of the divine spark that is the soul's essence. Blake makes us aware of the soul's divinity in the Songs of Innocence, and the children of these songs allow the soul that divinity. Joy, delight, love, and unity permeate the world of innocence. The children of this world are at one with God, and their oneness is so powerful it can transform even misery and despair.

But man cannot remain in the world of innocence forever. Sexual maturity signals his entry into the world of experience. He has reached the age of accountability. The world of experience is filled with misery, terror, cruelty and repression. Church, school, government and society's false morality combine to suppress man's innate joy and desire. Guilt and repression poison love, pervert sex, and corrupt virtue. Man is caught in a world of despair. He loses his sense of oneness with God and can no longer see the divinity that is both in him and in the world that surrounds him.

Blake stresses again and again that the characteristics of experience that block man's perception of divinity are inventions of his mind. They are "mindforg'd manacles." (pg. 75) The children of the Songs of Experience share the innate divinity of those of the Songs of Innocence. The physical world remains unchanged; it is the adult's perception of the world that corrupts it. The world's and mankind's divinity has not been destroyed by experience; it is only hidden by man's perversity.

In order for man to restore his perception of divinity, he must

integrate the worlds of innocence and experience. He cannot return to the innocent state, divine but unaware of his own divinity. He must attain knowledge of God while residing in the real of experience. Many of the Songs of Experience serve to demonstrate the futility of conventional paths to God. We are shown that we cannot perceive God through our senses alone; neither can we know Him through reason or asceticism or conventional religion. These false paths to knowledge only widen the chasm between man and God.

Blake suggests that in order to restore the world's divinity, man must achieve a new level of consciousness, a state of wise innocence. The speakers of many of the Songs of Innocence have attained this state of combined wisdom and innocence. The piper/poet of the "Introduction," the mother of "a Cradle Song," and the speaker of "The Lamb" and "The Shepherd" are adults; they have been "wash'd in life's river" (pg. 61) of experience. But these wise innocents, though of the adult world of experience, see the divinity of child, man and nature. They are not the jaded adults of the Songs of Experience who see only "marks of weakness, marks of woe." (pg. 75) Their world is not one of misery and despair. Blake suggests, through the character of the wise innocent, that we can approach God and restore the world's divinity through the power of our creative energy. The wise innocent speaker/poets of the Songs of Innocence have created in their songs a divine and perfect world; they have the power to transform the world of experience. It is the creative act that mirrors God's own creation of the world. The essence of the world is created by God's idea of the world. If man can display a corresponding

creativity, as do the wise innocents of Blake's Songs of Innocence and of Experience, he has the power to transorm the world of experience into the world of innocence where one can reside in unity with all things.

FOOTNOTES

1. Northrup Frye, Introduction to Selected Poetry and Prose of William Blake. (New York, 1953), p. xiv.

2. William Blake, Songs of Innocence and of Experience in Poetry and Prose of William Blake, 4th edition, ed. by Geoffrey Keynes. (London, 1939), p. 51. All subsequent reference to this work will be indicated by parenthesis within the text.

3. William Blake, Vala, or The Four Zoas in Poetry and Prose of William Blake, 4th edition, ed. by Geoffrey Keynes. (London, 1939), p. 321.

4. William Blake, The Marriage of Heaven and Hell in Poetry and Prose of William Blake, 4th edition, ed. by Geoffrey Keynes. (London, 1939), p. 193.

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